

Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue: Avoiding Burnout in the Mental Health Workplace

*“SOMETIMES THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN A WHOLE DAY
IS THE REST WE TAKE BETWEEN TWO DEEP BREATHS.”
-ETTY HILLESUM*

Dr. Kirsten Vincent PhD., LMHC, NYSCPS
CEO Recovery Options Made Easy



“Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.”

Eleanor Brownn

Objectives

Define:

Burnout

Vicarious Trauma

Self-Care



Discuss trauma, it's symptoms, impact on helpers

Discuss self care and coping skills to manage VT

Resources for staff

Work Force Concerns

- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Vicarious Trauma
- Burnout

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious traumatization (VT)

Secondary post traumatic stress reaction

Secondary traumatic stress

Secondary traumatic stress disorder

Compassion fatigue

Compassion stress

Soul sadness

Empathic strain

Contact victimization



It's not a matter of "If" it's a matter of "When"

Vicarious Trauma

“There is a soul weariness that comes with caring. From daily doing business with the handiwork of fear. Sometimes it lives at the edges of one’s life, brushing against hope and barely making its presence known. At other times, it comes crashing in, overtaking one with its vivid images of another’s terror with its profound demands for attention; nightmares, strange fears, and generalized hopelessness.”

B. Hudnall Stamm, Ph.D.

What is to give light
must endure burning.

– Dr. Viktor Frankl



CuriositiesByDickens.com

Burnout:

Related to feeling of being overloaded

Work stress

Joy of work is lost

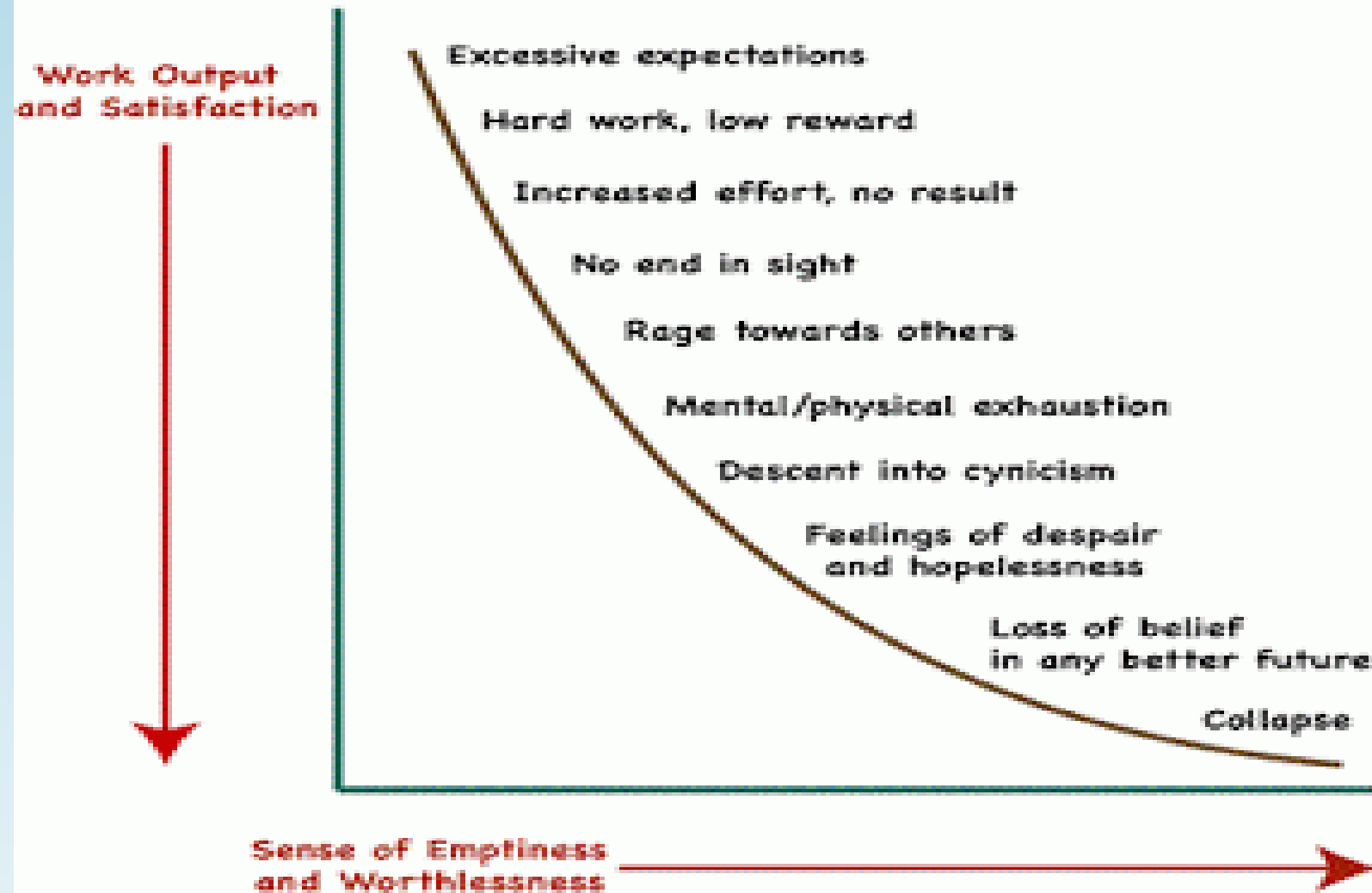
Can occur in any professional setting

Progresses gradually as a result of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inefficacy.

Does NOT lead to changes in trust, feelings of control, issues of intimacy, safety concerns, and intrusive traumatic imagery that are foundational to Vicarious Trauma.



THE BURNOUT CURVE



Source: Adapted from Coyote, C. (2006). Slow leadership. Retrieved, June 20, 2020 from <https://sites.google.com/site/teacherburnoutandresources/home>

Is “burnout” an ethical problem?



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Vicarious Trauma

- Vicarious trauma is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed or responsible to help them. Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical and spiritual well-being.
(Headington Institute)



Vicarious Trauma

- Cumulative –happens over time as you work with survivors of trauma, disasters, people who are struggling.
- Process of change is ongoing – this is hopeful as it provides opportunities for us to recognize the impact the work has on your lives early and to develop strategies to protect and care for ourselves.

Vicarious Trauma

Empathy

- When you identify with the pain of people who have endured terrible things, you bring their grief, fear, anger, and despair into your own awareness and experience.
- What sort of problems or people do you find it easy (or difficult) to empathize with?
- What are some ways that caring about people who have been hurt affects you?

Vicarious Trauma

Feeling committed or responsible to help

Your commitment and sense of responsibility can lead to high expectations and eventually contribute to your feeling burdened, overwhelmed, and hopeless/helpless.

Can lead you to extend yourself beyond what is reasonable for your own well-being or the best long-term interests of your participants.

How does your sense of commitment and responsibility to your work help you?
How might it be hurting you?



Reflection Activity

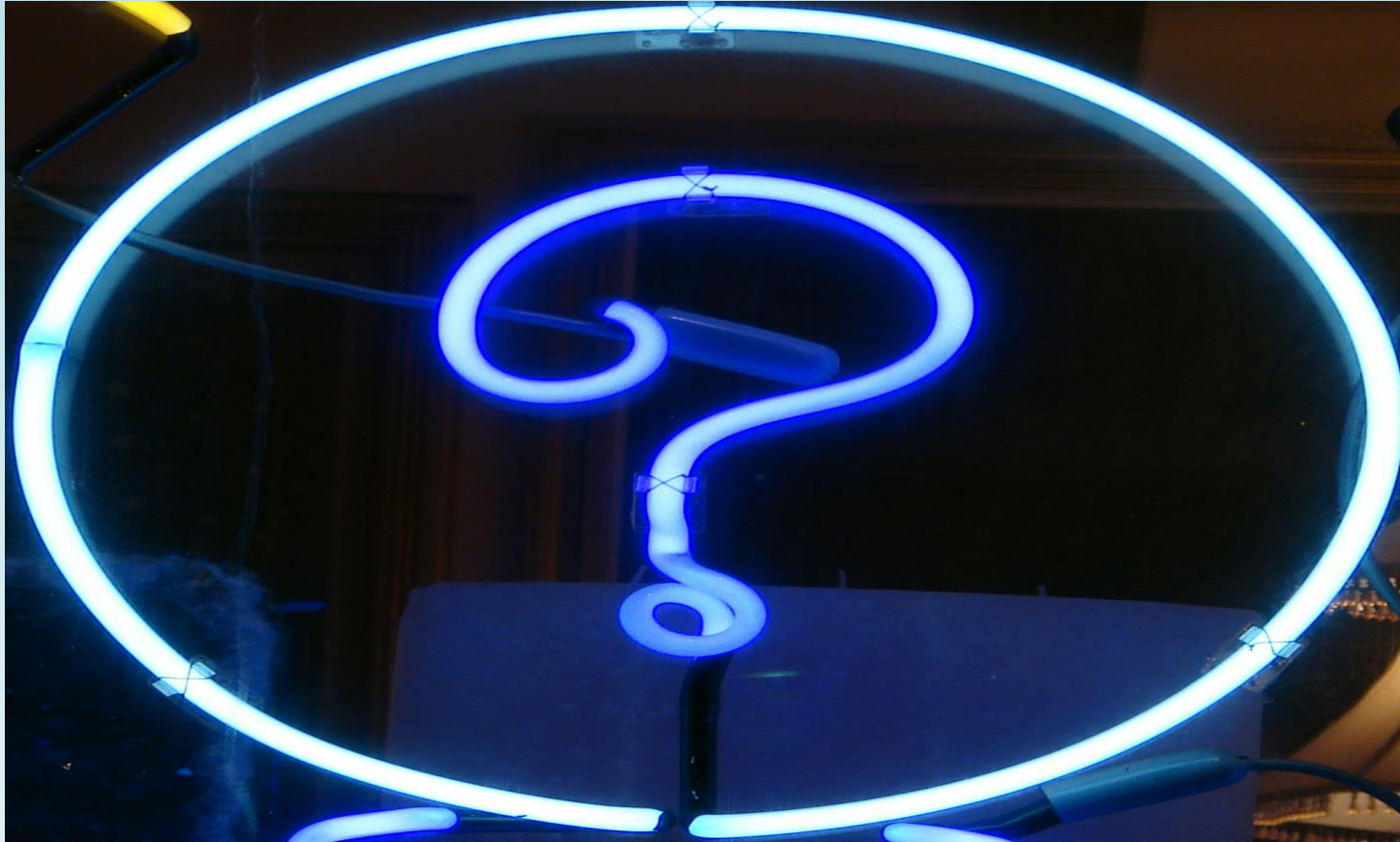
- How has working with Trauma Survivors Positively affected you?
 - How has it Negatively affected you?
 - Write down some of your thoughts.
-
- Think of words and phrases that reflect these thoughts and ideas.



When do you feel most alive, most like yourself?
What are you doing?
What or with whom are you surrounded?



Questions?



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Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue: Avoiding Burnout in the Mental Health Workplace Part 2

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Review of Part 1

- Questions

Burn Out

Recognizing

- Physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion
- Believing your work doesn't have meaning
- Having low energy
- Persistent negative or cynical attitude

Causes

- Frail personal boundaries
- Financial issues
- Chronic personal struggles
- Change: new beginnings, losses, or struggles

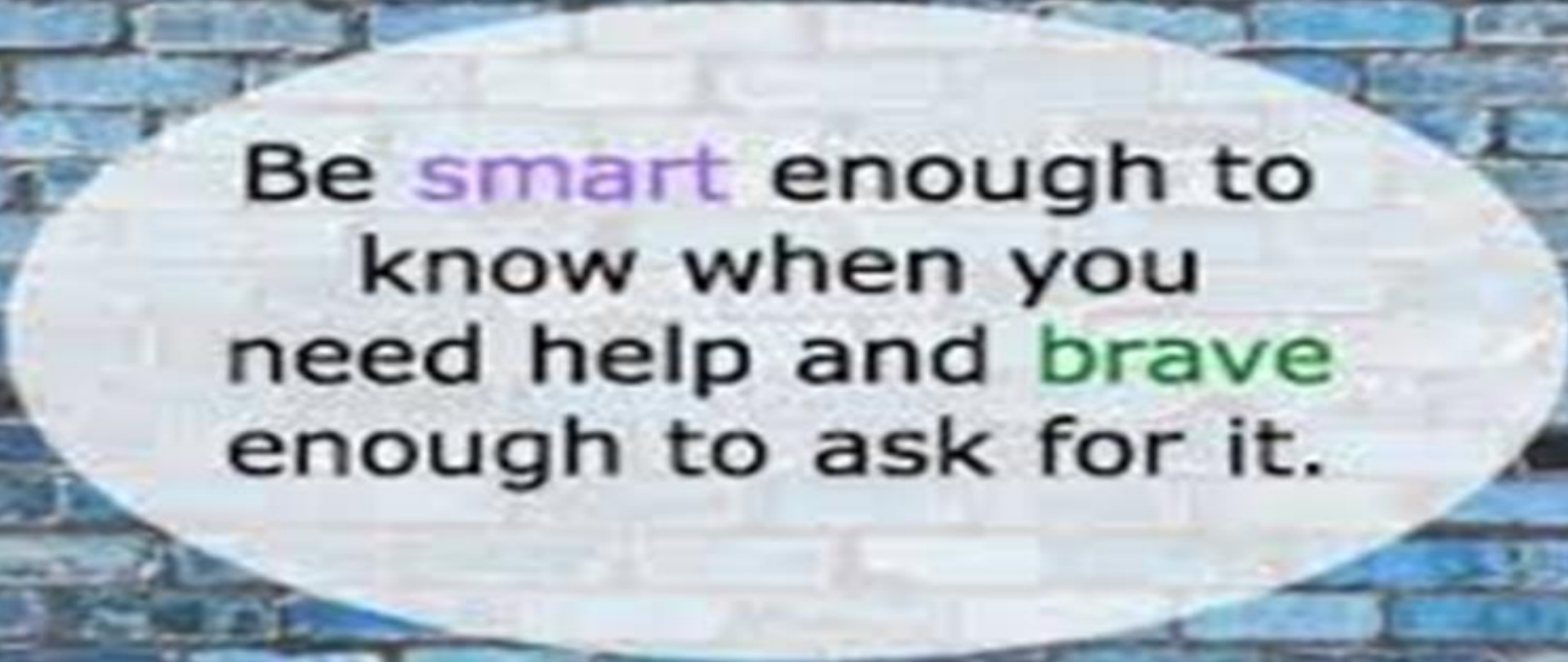
Signs and symptoms

- Feeling frustration or anger about a participant's choices
- Thinking about a participant outside of work more than you want to
- Feeling anxious about working with a participant
- Feeling dread when you anticipate seeing a participant
- Feeling more worried than you think is necessary about a participant
- Feeling angry at a participant
- Feeling de-skilled or incompetent when you meet with a participant
- Taking on too much responsibility- difficulty leaving work at end of day – stepping in to control other's lives

Signs and Symptoms

- Feeling disconnected or dissociated from the participant, their emotions or the content of the session
- Having physical discomfort or pain while meeting with a participant, which seems connected with what you're working on
- Having other physical reactions to a participant's stories, e.g. increased heart rate, rapid or shallow breathing, nausea, feeling frozen etc.
- Feeling traumatized after talking with a participant about specifics of their abuse
- Wanting to cry during/after meeting with a participants
- Feeling helpless about your work with a participants
- Feeling enraged at a participant's perpetrators

Asking for Help- it is not always easy

A light-colored, oval-shaped plaque is mounted on a wall made of blue and grey cobblestones. The plaque contains the text "Be smart enough to know when you need help and brave enough to ask for it." The word "smart" is highlighted in purple, and the word "brave" is highlighted in green.

Be **smart** enough to
know when you
need help and **brave**
enough to ask for it.

What has been your chief
stressor so far?

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“According to the latest research, the average human body is 20% water and 80% stress.”

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**"I'm learning how to relax, doctor —
but I want to relax *better* and *faster*!
I want to be on the cutting edge of relaxation!"**

HOW DO YOU RELAX?

What is good self care?

- Set good boundaries
- Embrace your total self: strengths and vulnerabilities
- Exercise and play regularly
- Know what relaxes you
- Make a checklist of small projects that you definitely can complete
- Reach out to people!



Self Care

What helps?

An effective action plan for addressing vicarious trauma and self care will reflect your own needs, experiences, interests, resources, culture, and values.

Escape – get away from work/trauma material

Rest – do things you find relaxing

Play – physical activity, creativity, laugh

Self-Care is a
priority and necessity
- not a luxury -
in the work that we do.

Self Care

- Tools of transforming helplessness
 - Awareness – Being attuned to own needs, limits, emotions, reactions, resources. Mindfulness and acceptance. Keep mind and body in same place.
 - Balance – Professional and personal – rest/work/play. i.e. Eat lunch/go home at end of shift. Spend time laughing with friends
 - Connection – To oneself, others, something larger. Decreases isolation, increases validation and hope. An essential part of spiritual connection is to find one's own path to connecting with a sense of awe, joy, purpose, meaning, and hope and visiting it frequently.

Self Care Strategies to Consider

Yoga/ Tai Chi /Dance	Long baths/aromatherapy	Mindful eating
Biking, hiking, running	Journaling, singing	Massage
Travel	Time with friends	Personal psychotherapy
Sex	Eat and sleep	Laugh
Seek spiritual renewal/pray	Meditation	Hobbies, sports, creative interests
Gardening/baking	Bubble baths/movie night	Forgive yourself
Walking/petting dog	Establish boundaries	Separating work from home
Guard against addictive behaviors		Acupressure/tapping

Seek out experiences which instill hope and comfort

Self Care

- Talk with co-workers about self care strategies that work – share ideas
 - Filling the basket
 - Water returning to earth
 - Showering imagery
- Take 2-3 minutes to be still in between appointments
- Develop containment strategies
- Prioritize your own well-being over your participants



Self Care

- Why do you do this work?
- How do you measure success in your work?
- What can you control in your work?
- What are the costs and rewards of this work and how are you personally changing?



The greatest gift you can give to somebody is
your own personal development.

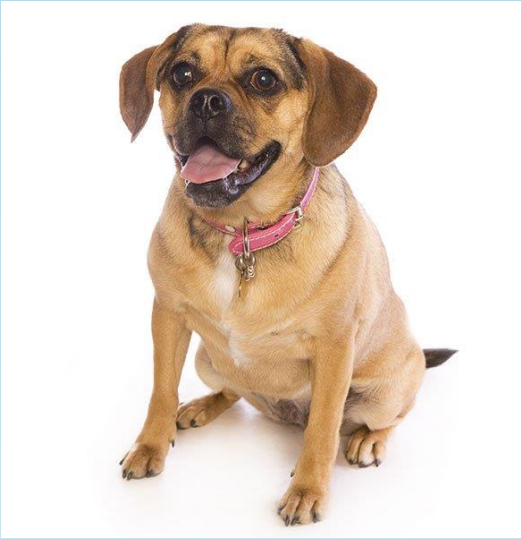
I used to say, 'If you will take care of me,
I will take care of you.'

Now I say, 'I will take care of me for you,
if you will take care of you for me.'

— Jim Rohn



Find Your Chair



“And now that you don’t have to be perfect, you can be good.”

John Steinbeck